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WASHINGTON TIMES
18 January 1985

Panel will question CIA's control of U.S. aid to Afghanistan rebels

By Thomas D. Brandt
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The new chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee says his panel will question the "command and control" abilities of the CIA over the \$250 million annually sent to rebels fighting Soviet occupation forces in Afghanistan.

However, Sen. David Durenberger, R-Minn., said the Soviets are now mired in "their own Vietnam" in Afghanistan, and he would not challenge U.S. policy to resist the military suppression of that Moslem country on the Soviets' southern border.

Sen. Durenberger, who says poor management of the CIA-assisted efforts in Nicaragua has damaged U.S. policy in Central America, wants the committee to look deeply into "command and control" of U.S. covert operations around the globe.

"But it's really important ... this Afghanistan. It's going to illustrate a good problem on command and control because you can control that only up to a certain point. ... We can't control it," the senator said in an interview this week.

"Our main job on findings on covert action is to determine whether, if implemented or if discovered, it would be a deterrent in

some way to national security policy," he added.

"We aren't in the policy business. You want to debate Central American policy, go to Foreign Relations [committee]. You want to debate Afghanistan policy, the overall policy of why are we doing it and how does this relate to U.S. foreign policy, go to Foreign Relations. Don't come to the intelligence committee," he said.

Mr. Durenberger became chairman of the 15-member intelligence panel earlier this month as a required rotation of members has

replaced nine senators. The chairman said that scrutiny of command and control will be one good way to lead the largely new membership "back to basics" in the intricacies of intelligence work.

The House and Senate intelligence committees have the responsibility to oversee the CIA and other U.S. agencies that conduct intelligence and covert operations. The Afghanistan program is thought to be the largest single U.S. covert operation in terms of funds spent.

Numerous government sources have confirmed that the United States is providing about \$250 million a year to the rebels, who are fighting Soviet forces that first entered the country in 1979.

Another \$200 million is thought to be coming from other countries, with most of the aid being funneled through neighboring Pakistan.

"My understanding of the current policy is that anything that will keep the Soviets busy in their own Vietnam, that doesn't drive us into any kind of direct kind of defense ... may well advance our national security," Sen. Durenberger said.

"I find it hard to believe that you're going to get the Soviets to disengage from Afghanistan. It's just part of their plan for a warm water port. So the best you can do is sort of bog them down and keep them busy there," he added.

A recent report from London in Jane's Defense Weekly said that the original invasion force of 100,000 is thought to have been reduced by the Soviets to 76,000. The same report said these forces face about 90,000 Moslem fighters. The latest U.S. Defense Department estimate of Soviet strength is 108,000.

Mr. Durenberger said he was not challenging the policy of employing covert operations, "but the process."

"We've been doing CA [covert action] forever, and hopefully we will. It's an extremely important part of implementing the national security policy," he said.

"Instead of having a hearing on atrocities in Central America, or something else like that, we're going to go back and examine the command and control of the decision-making system of covert activity in a sort of general sense and perhaps look at it with some specificity in various parts of the world," he said.

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